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ABSTRACT

This exercise is intended to teach the sense of sentences and their place in the larger fabric of paragraphs as they are woven into organized papers. Based on the five-paragraph theme (introduction, three body paragraphs, and conclusion), the exercise divides "What I Haved Lived For," the prologue to "The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1872-1914," into 18 sentences which are presented to students in random order. The goal is to have students put the sentences into their proper order which includes grouping them into five paragraphs. The summary states that, in order for students to successfully solve the puzzle, they must pay more attention than usual to key words on which sentences and paragraphs turn and to structural elements in sentences. The correct order of the sentences and a copy of "What I Have Lived For" are included. (DC)

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Piecing Together Bertrand Russell's "What I Have Lived For": An Exercise for Students Studying the Five-Paragraph Theme

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Level:

High school and college

Author's Comment:

I have found the following exercise helpful in teaching the sense of sentences and their place in the larger fabric of paragraphs which one can weave into organized papers, specifically the five-paragraph theme. After having presented the idea of the five-paragraph theme, I like to hand the students the following assignment, a scrambled version of Bertrand Russell's "What I Have Lived For," his prologue to *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1872-1914.*

Exercise:

Use what you have learned about the construction of a five-paragraph theme to determine the proper order of the following sentences which should be grouped in five paragraphs.

1. With equal passion I have sought knowledge.
2. I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy — ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy.
3. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.
4. But always pity brought me back to earth.
5. This has been my life.
6. I have sought it, finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined.
7. Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind.
8. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness — that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss.
9. I have wished to understand the hearts of men.
10. Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens.
11. I have wished to know why the stars shine.
12. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.

13. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.
14. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux.
15. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.
16. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what — at last — I have found.
17. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart.
18. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be.

Introduction: _____

Body Paragraph One: _____

Body Paragraph Two: _____

Body Paragraph Three: _____

Conclusion: _____

Summation:

The scrambled version of Russell's essay presented above challenges students to read and think about writing in a way they seldom do when given the regular reading assignment. Delighting in the puzzle, they pay more attention than usual to key words on which sentences and paragraphs turn: "equal," "first," "finally," "next," and the number "three." However, the students realize that their first priority is to find a more powerful structural element than such words as "equal" and "finally." For example, "first," "next," and "finally" do not signify body paragraphs one, two, and three. The students — working individually — usually find Russell's thesis statement and, in the process, realize the value of a clear thesis statement. They appreciate Russell's clarity; they understand that it was Russell's effectiveness — not their own magical powers —which helped some of them find the proper order for the sentences. A few students, invariably, will determine the correct order!

Here is the proper ordering for the sentences of "What I Have Lived For":
Introduction: 7-13.
Body Paragraph One: 2-8-6-16.
Body Paragraph Two: 1-9-11-14-3.
Body Paragraph Three: 10-4-17-18-15.
Conclusion: 5-12.

PROLOGUE

WHAT I HAVE LIVED FOR

Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search for knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching to the very verge of despair.

I have sought love, first, because it brings ecstasy — ecstasy so great that I would often have sacrificed all the rest of life for a few hours of this joy. I have sought it, next, because it relieves loneliness — that terrible loneliness in which one shivering consciousness looks over the rim of the world into the cold unfathomable lifeless abyss. I have sought it, finally, because in the union of love I have seen, in a mystic miniature, the prefiguring vision of the heaven that saints and poets have imagined. This is what I sought, and though it might seem too good for human life, this is what — at last — I have found.

With equal passion I have sought knowledge. I have wished to understand the hearts of men. I have wished to know why the stars shine. And I have tried to apprehend the Pythagorean power by which number holds sway above the flux. A little of this, but not much, I have achieved.

Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward toward the heavens. But always pity brought me back to earth. Echoes of cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hatred burden to their sons, and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make a mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate the evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer.

This has been my life, I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me.

— Bertrand Russell, "What I Have Lived For," in *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell, 1872-1914* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1967), p. 13.